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LOCAL OFFICIALS TEAM UP WITH NATIONAL LEADERSHIP TO REDUCE GUN CRIME IN OUR COMMUNITY

Federal Gun Crime Prosecutions Hit Record Highs, While Violent Crime Rate Hits 30-Year Low

Raleigh, North Carolina – The National Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) Conference met this week in Kansas City, Missouri, and included a *25-person delegation from the Eastern District of North Carolina. Attorney General John Ashcroft spoke to over 1,150 federal, state, and local prosecutors, law enforcement officials, community leaders, and other members of the PSN teams from across the nation who came together to discuss efforts to reduce and prosecute gun crime. PSN is President Bush's comprehensive initiative to combat gun crime in America by providing locally-based programs with the tools and resources they need to succeed. (*Note: A photo of the EDNC delegation with Attorney General Ashcroft is posted on the U. S. Attorney's web page at <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/nce/pressReleases/2004-Jun-18.jpg> and also can be provided via email upon request.)

“Through Project Safe Neighborhoods’ unprecedented partnership of state, local and federal leaders, we are turning the tide on gun crime,” said Attorney General John Ashcroft. “We are taking gun-wielding criminals off our streets. The last three years represent a record of great success, but working together, we can do even more to make our neighborhoods safe.”

U. S. Attorney Frank D. Whitney added, “In the Eastern District of North Carolina, we are committed to making our homes, neighborhoods, and families safer. By the aggressive prosecution of repeat violent offenders, we are preventing homicides and other violent crimes. The District’s recognition this week at the National PSN Conference--**Honorable Mention-Most Improved Gun Violence Program**--reflects the District’s tireless efforts to combat gun violence.”

U. S. Attorney Whitney and Assistant U. S. Attorney Jane J. Jackson, PSN Coordinator for the Eastern District, led the delegation from the District and were honored at an Awards Banquet on Wednesday night in Kansas City, Missouri, during the conference. The Eastern District was one of two Districts honored for **Most Improved Gun Violence Program** in the nation. There were a total of 25 awards presented at the conference.

The Award for Most Improved Gun Violence Program recognizes the EDNC for exemplary commitment and outstanding contributions to PSN. Since the implementation of “Project Safe Neighborhoods,” prosecutions for federal gun and violent crimes increased by 259%, and convictions for those offenses increased by 236%. In the last two years, 525 defendants have been or currently are being prosecuted under the PSN initiative in EDNC.

(MORE)

Federal Gun Crime Prosecutions Have Increased Significantly Every Year Under Project Safe Neighborhoods. From FY 2000 to FY 2003, federal firearms prosecutions increased by 68%. In FY 2003, the Justice Department filed over 10,500 federal firearms cases—the highest number ever recorded by the Department. The number of defendants charged with federal gun crimes rose from approximately 10,600 to over 13,000 from FY 2002 to FY 2003, a record increase of almost 23%. These figures are the highest on record in a single year since the Department began recording this information. In FY 2003, nearly all — 93% — of convicted defendants, who were originally charged with federal firearms offenses, were sentenced to some time in prison for convictions on firearms charges or other charges. 72% were sentenced to more than three years in prison, and over half of all defendants convicted were sentenced to more than five years in federal prison. State and local prosecutions have also increased.

Project Safe Neighborhoods Is Working In the Eastern District of North Carolina. U. S. Attorney Whitney and AUSA Jackson, working side-by-side with state and local law enforcement, prosecutors, and other community leaders, have created a PSN strategy to fit the unique gun crime problems in Raleigh and Wake County, Fayetteville and Cumberland County, Johnston County, the City of Lumberton, and Greenville and Pitt County, as well as Wilmington and New Hanover County. Criminals who use guns are prosecuted under federal, state, or local laws, depending on which jurisdiction can provide the most appropriate punishment.

Project Safe Neighborhoods Has Contributed to Decreasing the Violent Crime Rate to Its Lowest Levels in 30 Years, But Reducing Gun Crime Remains an Important Goal. The violent crime rate is now at its lowest level since 1973, when the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics started collecting criminal victimization data. The violent crime rate for the first two years of the Bush Administration (2001-2002) was nearly 21% lower than for 1999-2000. The per capita number of violent crimes *involving firearms* has dropped 14% in 2001-2002, from 1999-2000. There were approximately 64,000 fewer gun crimes and approximately 12% (almost 130,000) fewer victims of gun crime in 2001-2002, than in 1999-2000.

Project Safe Neighborhoods Takes a Multifaceted Approach to Reducing Gun Crime. Gun crime reduction is President Bush's top domestic criminal justice initiative, and the Bush Administration has devoted over \$1 billion to Project Safe Neighborhoods in its first four years (FY 2001 to FY 2004). The funds have been used to hire new federal, state, and local prosecutors, provide training, hire research and community outreach support, and develop and promote effective prevention and deterrence efforts. Each of the 94 federal judicial districts engages in deterrence and prevention efforts through community outreach and media campaigns and ensures that law enforcement and prosecutors have the training they need.

The PSN conference is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice. To find out more about PSN and its local programs, visit the PSN website at www.psn.gov.

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